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William S Van Allen 04/16/2002 10:04:38 AM From DB/inbox: William S Van Allen

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TELEGRAM

April 15, 2002

To: SECSTATE WASHDC - IMMEDIATE
Action: INR
From: AMEMBASSY QUITO (QUITO 1395 - IMMEDIATE)
TAGS: PREL, OPRC, KIRC, KPAO, EC
Captions: None
Subject: MEDIA REACTION: VENEZUELAN CRISIS: QUITO
Ref: None

1. Summary: The Ecuadorian print media refrained from indulging in conspiracy theories about an alleged U.S. role in the crisis in Venezuela, criticizing instead weak democratic institutions, corrupt elites, and the confrontational policies of Hugo Chavez. A Saturday column in "El Universo" called Chavez a "victim of his own abuses" (para 2), while an editorial the same day in "El Comercio" opined that events in Venezuela made it clear that Latin America needs to revise the structure of its societies (para 3). The message scarcely changed after Chavez' return, with one column April 15 claiming that "The people of Latin America are tired of their political classes, which are opportunist and incapable," (para 6) and another in Quito's left-center "Hoy," proclaiming that "you reap what you sow (para 8). The lone exception was the pronouncement of an "El Pais" journalist (reprinted in "El Universo") that the U.S. "contributed to the ouster of Chavez" (para 5). End summary.

2. "Now and Forever" an opinion column (04/13) by Alfonso Oramas in Guayaquil's (and Ecuador's) leading center-right "El Universo" (weekend circ. 160,000)

Quote: The one sure thing is that Chavez, in trying to shake the foundations of corrupt policy tied to party interests, was the victim of his own abuses that led him to flirt with the ambition of total power. He wasted the broad popular support that he enjoyed for years, which deteriorated, in the end, due to frustration over the failure of his economic plan."

3. "Latin American Fragility" an editorial (14/13) in Quito's leading centrist "El Comercio" (weekend circulation 90,000)

Quote: "The overthrow of another head of state is a serious indication of a new era of instability, whose causes transcend grave personal or governmental mistakes.

"If collective and institutional behavior does not change, the news coming out of our countries in the near future will be negative. It will be marked by violent popular demonstrations . . . and the resignation or flight of citizens who were anointed by the popular will as Heads of State.

"The Venezuelan experience requires revisions of the structure of Latin America. These are societies of severe

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inequality, unresolved since

Independence; of rudimentary economies, maltreated by the developed world, and without a culture that is capable of developing efficient public institutions, with just a few exceptions.

4. "Lessons from Venezuela" an editorial (04/14) in Guayaquil's (and Ecuador's) leading center-right "El Universo" (weekend circulation 160,000)

Quote: Hugo Chavez was one of those who contributed most to his own failure and to the political instability in his country. His authoritarianism, his attempts to control the press, his controversial political and social reforms, and his alienation of important sectors of civil society inevitably lost him support until, in the end, he had no alternative other than to resign.

"Democratic institutions came out the losers, the legality of the system was badly hurt, and - most importantly -- the people's confidence in the idea that countries can move forward with order and respect was shaken.

5. "U. S.-2, Rest of the World -- 0" an opinion column (04/14) by Miguel Angel Bastenier, Assistant Director of "El Pais", Spain, in Guayaquil's (and Ecuador's) leading center-right "El Universo" (weekend circ. 160,000)

Quote: Neither Athens, nor Rome, nor Spain, France or Britain managed a domination of the world comparable to that (enjoyed by) the U.S. today.

"... the White House has ousted or contributed to the ouster of two regimes -- the Taliban in Afghanistan, via direct action and the ground support of a local alliance, and Chavez in Venezuela, simply by making it known to an army and a people who feel chaotically governed, that the current President is too much. As a result, the geopolitical world championship is today 2-0 in favor of a team that always plays on its own field, because the whole world is its own.

6. "Chavez is Gone," an opinion column (04/15) by Raul Izurita in Guayaquil's (and Ecuador's) leading center-right "El Universo" (weekend circ. 160,000)

Quote: "Ecuador and Venezuela have been victims of the same trouble. . . .

"In both countries the citizens and democracy were the victims. The politicians did not understand the burden they carried. They thought they were the owners of the country. They underestimated their countries. . . .

"When he began his term, Chavez's government had support of 75 percent of the population. When he fought the traditional political parties, which had a long history of corruption, the country increased its support. The people of Latin America are tired of their political classes, which are opportunist and incapable. . . .

"Wherever Chavez went he was acclaimed. Then he was hit by the dizziness that political power can cause. He began to do everything that a president should not. . . .

"Four presidents have been overthrown by their people in South America. Four who have been inefficient and whom the people have not tolerated. Four examples that demonstrate that the people are the only true

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owners of their countries.

7. "Chavez and Us" an opinion column (04/15) by Federico Maria Sanfeliu in Quito's center-left (influential) "Hoy" (circ. 25,000).

Quote: "Once again the military are decisive in our Latin America. . . .

Venezuela is a rich country, addicted to corruption, that for many years has forgotten the meaning of hard work and has ignored paying taxes. . . .

"Chavez, in economics, was a certified failure. In politics he lived by a dramatic populism that confronted his country. A few months from now our Ecuador will have presidential elections, Chavez provides us something to think about. What programs of government will our candidates be presenting?

8. "Venezuela not viable with Chavez" an opinion column (04/15) in Quito's center-left (influential) "Hoy" (circ. 25,000)

Quote: You reap what you sow. The personality and political conduct of Hugo Chavez generated confrontation. The regime opened up too many internal and external fronts. The presidential rhetoric did not resolve the country's problems, it increased them. Nor did his promises become reality for the majority; although Venezuela is the world's fourth largest oil supplier, 70 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line; in the last three years, unemployment and underemployment increased.

"In the international arena, Chavez' relationship

with Kadaffi, Saddam Hussein and Fidel Castro created suspicion on the part of the US; the international community was worried by the Venezuelan regime's reaction to the French government regarding the terrorist Carlos; in addition, the accusations that it was protecting the FARC created a tense relationship with Colombia. . . .

"In 48 hours the coup and counter-coup in Venezuela have left the regime's credibility too battered. If such massive changes came about so quickly, who can guarantee that the military's conflict of interests has been overcome? The institutional fragility of a system in which the final referees are still the armed forces has been revealed. As long as this does not change, democracy will not mature, either in Venezuela or in other Latin American countries with a similar situation.

9. "Coup and Counter-coup in Caracas" an editorial (04/15) in Quito's center-left (influential) "Hoy" (circ. 25,000)

"The democratic conscience of Latin America is still weak. . . .

"However, it would be wrong to think that all the responsibility for the Venezuelan crisis lies with the president. . . .

"Without a doubt, this episode will weaken the legal system in Venezuela. It is also alarming that the media did not warn the country of this danger, in the same way that in Ecuador we failed to warn (in 1997) of Abadala Bucaram's erratic and scandalous government

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"Political instability is one of the worst things Latin American countries can succumb to. In a globalized world it is wrong to think that problems such as poverty, lack of opportunities, corruption, or insecurity will be corrected by authoritarian regimes, whatever their ideology. Economic and political reforms have to be made in a process protected by legal and constitutional norms.

10. "Lessons from Venezuela" an opinion column" (14/15) by Miguel Rivadeneira Vallejo in Quito, leading centrist "El Comercio" (circ. 70,000).

Quote: "The events of Venezuela have left lessons and the need for urgent rectifications from all sectors.

...
"Chavez violated freedom of the press, which generated international condemnation. Nonetheless, he was elected at the ballot, so his voters failed.

"The U.S. was mistaken in its policy. It backed the actions of the military rebels. In some cases it blocks military rebellions (such as in Ecuador in 2000) and in others it accepts them. Where are the democratic and institutional principles?

The events leave lessons. If we wish to avoid populist governments and demagogic leaders, we have to work hard at political education. We must fight corruption, without impunity and protection for corrupt allies. We must introduce radical changes to reduce poverty and social injustice. . . .

All sectors have a responsibility and they must rectify themselves. Not only governors who make mistakes. Also the elite, congressmen and political leaders, businessmen, bankers, union leaders, business associations, judges, priests, the military and the media, without exceptions. . . . Due to a lack of political education not only of the people, but at other levels, it is easy for people to be fooled.

11. "Counter-coup and Democratic Legitimacy" an editorial (04/15) in Quito's center-left, (influential) "Hoy" (circ. 25,000)

Quote "The President has called for calm; but Venezuela is too divided to be able to guarantee that peace will return immediately, even more so when nobody can confirm that the military has repaired all its divisions. The President previously unleashed an acute confrontation, it is unlikely that he will be able to heal the wounds of institutional democracy, having polarized Venezuelan society with his previous conduct.

"The cloudy political horizon will only clear when the country gets rid of the new conflicts and resolves the current ones using democratic mechanisms which can legitimize the exercise of power.

An alternative would be the calling of new elections so that the people can put the legitimacy of power in the hands of new leaders, after the current president has damaged his legitimacy so much with constitutional violations and bloody repression.

12. "Democracy in Flames" published in "La Nacion, Argentina" was carried in Quito's leading centrist "El Comercio" (circ. 70,000) on April 15.

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